

A Trouble in Mind Review

In timely fashion with the recent election, Trouble in Mind comes as a refresher of the turmoil concerning the civil rights of African-Americans in the past. There was a climate of immense change in the United States in the 1950s. African-Americans were subject to voting rights equal to that of Whites, but they were in no way treated the same. “*Separate but equal*” facilities fueled this unfair treatment and many people, black and white alike, were fed up with this double standard, but the majority of the American population tolerated such injustices. Trouble in Mind follows a mixed racial group of people that are involved in a play revolving around a lynching called *Chaos in Belleview*. The lead actress of the play within the play Willetta Mayer is sick and tired of playing the same stereotypical black character. She is always cast to play the housemaid and is expected to speak in the same tone of voice and use the same expressions time and time again. The characters Mayer portrays are often uneducated and do as they are told by their white masters, but Mayer herself is nothing like her characters. She is head strong and whip smart. She knows what is expected of her and, though she does not prefer to act in such a clichéd manner, Mayer knows that it is necessary for her survival in the white man’s world.

The director of *Chaos in Belleview*, Manners, is one such white man whom believes he is doing Mayer an enormous service by casting her in a play that is against lynching and, therefore, sends a strong message to the community about black rights. He does not realize how racist he, himself, is in turn being. Mr. Manners is someone that has convinced himself that he is doing his part in the world to combat racism. What he fails to realize, however, is that he is not doing much at all. He is submitting himself to a society that allows for him to behave in such a submissive way and get away with it. Though he feels that he is making a world of difference, he is actually setting Mayer back by keeping her chained to one character and within a stereotype.

The supporting characters mainly play around the actions of Mayer and Manners. John, the newcomer to the play, is fresh faced and in denial about the realities of the world. He and the young white actress in the play get along as if there are not any barriers in between them. They do not realize that too many people’s emotions, mainly anger and despair, are too strong for them to be building a friendship. Too much is wrong for them to act as if nothing is. John does not view Manners in the same negative light that Mayer does. He does not feel that he should behave as he wants him to behave though Mayer advises him that is for the best. When Mayer becomes upset that Manners is treating the giving up of her son to be lynched in the play too lightly, John, along with everyone else, does not see why Ms. Mayer is so upset. He changes his opinion of the situation; however, when Manners tells Mayer that he would not act in the same that her character in the play does because it is not his son involved in the situation. This changes John’s opinion of Manners because he finally sees the core of who he is. Mr. Manners is a complex character, made up of many layers, but, in the end, he is not the good person that he sets himself out to be.

Trouble in Mind is definitely a play that plays on people's emotions. The viewer becomes absorbed in Ms. Mayer's intense acting and Mr. Manner's contradictory reasoning. The rest of the supporting cast adds humor to an often serious subject and, in the end, all parties involved realize that they have all been wronged and done wrong in some way. All, however, learn an important lesson: everyone is equal.